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NOAA ANALYSIS FOLLOWING WORLD TRADE CENTER COLLAPSE FINDS LITTLE SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN COASTAL CONTAMINANT CONCENTRATIONS

The National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration has found in a recent analysis of sites in the Hudson-Raritan estuary that the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001 caused no significant changes in concentrations of two groups of contaminant compounds.

A summary of the analysis is presented in "Chemical contamination of the Hudson-Raritan estuary as a result of the attack on the World Trade Center: Analysis of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and polychlorinated biphenyls in mussels and sediment "in the upcoming edition of the peer-reviewed journal Marine Pollution Bulletin, and currently available online on ScienceDirect at www.sciencedirect.com.

The results from the analysis indicate that concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were high in the Hudson-Raritan estuary before September 11th, 2001, and that their concentrations were not measurably changed by the contaminants that entered the estuary as a result of the collapse of the twin towers.

"Data from long-term monitoring of the study sites indicate that current contamination concentrations are largely at or below the values reported prior to the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings," said Gunnar Lauenstein, Ph.D., a physical scientist with NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment.

NOAA Mussel Watch Project scientists have collected and analyzed bivalve mollusks (mussels and oysters) for chemical contaminants from around the coastal United States since 1986, and determined what baseline levels of contaminants such as PAHs and PCBs were in the first years of the project. Five Mussel Watch sites in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary existed prior to September 11th. Scientists took samples of mussels and sediments from these sites, in December 2001 and November 2003, and compared them with samples taken from the same sites prior to the collapse of the buildings. Scientists also took samples from seven new sites in 2001 and 2003 close to the World Trade Center location.

Analysis of the samples provided little evidence to support the conclusion that the collapse of the buildings had a significant effect on PAH input to the Hudson-Raritan estuary, and no evidence it had a significant effect on PCB input to the estuary.

"The Hudson-Raritan estuary had high background levels of PAHs and PCBs prior to the collapse of the buildings," said Lauenstein. "This may have obscured contaminant input into the estuary as a result of the collapse."

Since Mussel Watch Project scientists revisit the same sites over time, the data collected at long-term monitoring sites can be used to show trends in banned industrial chemical contaminant levels. It also can be used to make environmental findings related to unusual incidents or spills involving chemicals, as in the case of the World Trade Center attack and subsequent building collapses.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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